



## Local Wildlife Sites Project: Citation for The Lench Meadows

<b>Site Name:</b> The Lench Meadows	<b>Site Ref:</b> SP25C1	<b>Grid Ref:</b> SP210555
<b>Local Authority Area:</b> Stratford-on-Avon DC		<b>Resurvey</b>
<b>Ownership:</b> Stratford-on-Avon DC	<b>Area:</b> 29ha	<b>Management:</b> C
<b>1. Summary of importance.</b> <p>The Lench Meadows LWS, formerly known as Riverside Meadows SINC, was originally designated in February 2006. It comprises a mosaic of unmanaged habitats located beside the River Avon close to the town centre, including flood meadows, marsh, wet woodland, scrub and post-industrial grassland, which together support a rich flora and fauna. Due to their status as a public open space and position close to the river and town centre, they also form an important recreational area.</p>		
<b>2. Position in the landscape and access.</b> <p>The site is situated in the River Avon flood plain and extends for around 1km on the west bank from a point 150m north-east of Clopton Bridge in the centre of Stratford-upon-Avon, up to a point between the southern end of Welcombe Park and the village of Tiddington. The A439 Warwick Road forms much of the western boundary and the River Avon LWS, the eastern boundary. The surrounding land comprises mainly of amenity grassland, parkland, plantations, large gardens and suburban development, but ranges from urban (Stratford Leisure Centre and the Holiday Inn) at the south-western end to the rural fringe at the north-east end. The Lench Meadows is easily the largest terrestrial LWS around the Stratford town area, with most of the others being quite small by comparison. The nearest designated LWSs include Clopton House Meadow (1km north-west), Cadle Pool Farm Meadow (3km west), Bordon Hill Old Rifle Range (2.7km west-south-west), Bordon Hill Nurseries and Meadow (2.9km west-south-west), Steeplechase Meadow (LWS) and Racecourse Meadow SSSI (2km south-west) and Atherstone Old Airfield (2.8km south-south-east), but these have no or very little connectivity between them due to the urban sprawl of Stratford. The most important LWS is the River Avon and its tributaries which flows through the area and provides a major wildlife corridor of county importance, with the site directly connected to this. One extensive pLWS site of grassland and scrub which almost borders the site to the north-west (only separated by the Warwick Road) is the Welcombe Estate (including the Welcombe Hills NR and The Dingles).</p> <p>The Lench Meadows is a popular public open space, with its own car park (not included in the LWS) located opposite the public bathing area on the adjoining river. Although there are no official public rights of way, a surfaced all weather footpath follows the riverbank while a network of grass tracks covers the rest of the site, many having arisen from regularly trodden desire lines.</p>		
<b>3. Land Use History.</b> <p>The Lench Meadows takes their name from The Lench which on maps appears to refer to the three small narrow islands in the river towards the southern end of the site. This is perhaps a local name for a ledge or bank (related to Anglo-Saxon <i>hlenc</i> or <i>hlinc</i>) which was applied to the original steep-sided island before it was broken up by shifting currents. Before modification by landfill in the post-war period the area covered by the LWS originally comprised of seven fields (part of a larger</p>		



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complex) divided by well-timbered hedges or towards the south-west end, by deep water-filled drains emptying into the river near the Clopton Bridge. These meadows were low-lying and regularly flooded in winter, and extended to Bridgefoot and Clopton Bridge, where the only major building on this side of the road was the old cattle market. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century most of these fields were shut up for hay crops during the summer months (and contemporary accounts remarked on the abundance of calling Corn Crakes here in the long summer evenings), while after they were mown, they were grazed by livestock, mainly sheep. On rare occasions flash floods would drown livestock, as happened in October 1939 when it is reported that 75 sheep were drowned in the Warwick Road Fields. There was no real change to this riparian landscape until about 1920 when the pumping station was built beside the Warwick Road to help boost the town's drinking water supply. The public bathing place on the river came into being about then. During the 1920's and 30's Stratford began to expand and development spread along Bridgefoot and up the Warwick Road, with a new terrace of houses on the latter, the end of which now marks the boundary to the LWS. The field between this terrace and the pumping station 200m further up the road was quarried for gravel during this period. In the 1950's and 1960's this gravel pit was filled in with spoil and landfill and the tip was gradually expanded across about half the area of the old flood meadows, building up the land surface to form an artificial terrace up to 3m above the original surface. Most of this land had by then been acquired by Stratford Council and in the early 1970's the land towards Bridgefoot was redeveloped, with the Stratford Leisure Centre (opened in 1974) and a large hotel being constructed. The rest of the tip was, after extensive tree planting, eventually opened as a public open space. The surviving flood meadows along the river were leased out for grazing until around 1995 but have since been left unmanaged. A wildlife pond was constructed on the perimeter of the latter around this time but is now overgrown. At the Stratford end, to protect the dwindling Mute Swan population (which had been reduced to just one nesting pair by continual persecution) a public appeal raised funds for a secure swan sanctuary. This was established in about 1980 when the crescent-shaped pool was excavated at the south-western end of the site and was bordered by a planted woodland.

The site has remained largely unmanaged since 1995, apart from some additional tree planting.

#### **4. Topography and Geology.**

The original topography of the site was of a flat alluvial flood plain situated at around 30-40m ASL, which was partly drained by a stream system which flowed southwards to enter the river near Clopton Bridge. Since tipping with waste aggregates, much of the western side of the site is now around 3m higher, with a very thin topsoil in these areas, some of it being moderately acidic which is unusual in the local area. It is reported that water still drains across this area but under the tipped substrate and several small marshes and swamps have formed along the seepage line where the landfill meets the original alluvium in the river meadows below. The underlying geology is composed deep down of the calcareous Lower Lias Clay which has been overlain by river gravels and alluvium.

#### **5. Habitat Description.**

For descriptive purposes, the site has been divided into six habitat compartments, roughly corresponding to the five compartments (in brackets where differently named) used in the 2005 survey. These are: 1) Northern Field ('North of Car Park'), 2) Landfill Area, 3) Northern Flood Meadow and 4) Southern Flood Meadow (both listed under 'Meadow'), 5) Swamp Fields ('Tall herb/swamp') and 6) Swannery Pool and Woodland ('Wooded area').



### 1) Northern Field

In 2005 this rather damp field was still mostly species poor semi-improved grassland, having probably until a short time before been regularly grazed. It is now very neglected and overgrown with dominant tall ruderal with some localised patches of scattered self-seeded Hawthorn, Bramble, Dog Rose and Elder scrub. Sycamore, Plum and Osier were also noted. Tall ruderal is dominated by Great Willowherb and Common Nettle, with frequent Creeping Thistle, Meadowsweet and Curled Dock, and locally abundant Hemlock towards the northern end. In the wetter areas near the river there is locally frequent Wild Turnip, Marsh Woundwort and rare Marsh Ragwort, while a wide variety of other tall herbs recorded at low frequency include Greater Burdock, Wild Angelica, Marsh Thistle, Welled Thistle, Wild Teasel, Purple Loosestrife, Clustered Dock, Common Ragwort and Tansy. Grasses are localised but False Oat-grass is frequent to locally abundant at the northern end and around the perimeter of the field. Most of the meadow grasses are now restricted to the vicinity of the two pathways on either side (particularly on the west side) and include frequent Meadow Foxtail, Common Bent, Red Fescue, Yorkshire Fog, Meadow Barley and Perennial Ryegrass. Some meadow forbs are also still found along the two pathways, with locally abundant Creeping Cinquefoil and White Clover, locally frequent Field Bindweed, and more occasional Agrimony, Common Mouse-ear, Cut-leaved Cranesbill, Field Forgetmenot, Meadow and Creeping Buttercups, Hoary Ragwort, Lesser Stitchwort and Goatsbeard. The western pathway has a slightly larger and more diverse area of semi-improved grassland (dominated by Meadow Foxtail) which also includes locally frequent Hairy Sedge and Spiked Sedge, with Yarrow, Common Knapweed, Dovesfoot Cranesbill, Perforate St. John's-wort, Silverweed, Selfheal, Spotted Medick and Upright Hedge-parsley in addition to many of the above. Narrow-leaved Ragwort, a recent county colonist is also present here but is rare. It is possible that Bee Orchids (present here in 2005, having probably spread from a colony on nearby Welcombe Hills) are still present by the western pathway, but none were found on the survey visit. Two hedgerows form the northern and southern boundaries to the field, the southern (bordering the car park) being of post-war date and consists of intact but neglected Hawthorns and some Elder. That on the north side is an old boundary, although now defunct and becoming gappy. It consists of Hawthorn and Blackthorn, with a row of mature standard trees including Ash, Crack Willow and notably a native Black Poplar. Typical shade plants occur on the hedge bank, with abundant Ground-ivy and Common Nettle, locally frequent Sweet Violet and more occasional Garlic Mustard, Cuckoo Pint, Herb Bennet and Wood Dock.

**NB** The adjoining small field immediately north of this compartment and known as 'the onion field' is in a similar condition and is open to access by the public. It has not been added to the LWS as it is in private ownership but should be considered for acquisition by the council in future.

### 2) Landfill Area

This large compartment, which includes all the area tipped in the 1960's, occupies the western half of the LWS and extends from the car park south to the Swannery (Area 6). Most of this old tip has a very thin topsoil which overlays the compacted spoil below. Although generally very dry there are scattered small patches of wetter ground where the groundwater manages to break through the landfill and reach the surface. Here there are patches of frequent Lesser Pond-sedge, Hard Rush and Reed Canary-grass, together with occasional Greater Pond-sedge, Pendulous Sedge and Soft Rush. These wet areas add to a diverse mosaic of habitats which range from patches of planted woodland, open and closed scrub, tall ruderal and rough tussock grassland. The most valuable habitat, however, is the short sward grassland which persists on either side of the main north-south central track and in the western corner. Here the soil is at its thinnest and quite sandy and stony.



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The grasses in this sward consist mainly of abundant Creeping Bent and frequent Red Fescue and Perennial Ryegrass, but among other species present is rare Heath-grass, which is exceptionally rare on the generally calcareous soils of the Stratford area. Small forbs are abundant in the short turf, particularly Ground-ivy, Dovesfoot Cranesbill, Spotted Medick, Creeping Cinquefoil and White Clover, with locally frequent Yarrow, Common Mouse-ear, Common Storks-bill, Autumn Hawkbit, Field Forgetmenot, Red Bartsia, Black Nightshade and Slender Trefoil, while a range of others include rare to occasional Scarlet Pimpernel, Small-flowered Cranesbill and Long-stalked Cranesbill. Price (2002) states that the county scarce Little Mouse-ear (*Cerastium semidecandrum*) is frequent in these short swards, but an earlier spring visit would be needed to confirm that this species is still present. Although most of the tip area is dominated by rank tussock grassland and tall ruderal, on the borders of the short sward grassland and locally on thinner soils elsewhere, is a medium height sward grassland containing a mix of species such as Common Bent, Cocksfoot, Red Fescue and Yorkshire Fog. Forbs are still diverse in this habitat and include several unusual species inherited from its past history as landfill. These include frequent to very locally abundant Welled Thistle, Hairy Sedge, Field Bindweed, Lady's Bedstraw, Perforate St. John's-wort, Field Pepperwort, Ribwort Plantain, Creeping Cinquefoil, Common Ragwort, White Champion and Lesser Stitchwort, with occasional to very locally frequent Agrimony, Musk Thistle, Spiked Sedge, Herb Bennet, Hedge Bedstraw, Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea, Common Mallow, Common Poppy, Amphibious Bistort, Bristly Oxtongue, Cowslip, Weld, Soapwort, Red and Hybrid Campions, Hedge Mustard, Tansy, Moth Mullein and Great Mullein. Other species noted at rare frequency included Columbine, Black Horehound, Hedgerow Cranesbill, Common Toadflax, Large-flowered and Common Evening-primroses, and Canadian Golden-rod. Additionally, a colony of naturalised Cotton Thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*) had been long established on a bank in 2002 (Price) and was still present in 2005 but could not be found during this survey.

Away from these more species-rich areas the habitat is less diverse and is composed mainly of rank tussock grassland dominated by False Oat-grass, together with frequent Cocksfoot and Common Couch, with occasional Tufted Hair-grass. Large areas are dominated by dense tall ruderal which often entirely replace the grasses, with particularly abundant Creeping Thistle, Hemlock and Common Nettle. There is also locally abundant Large Bindweed (particularly along the steep bank overlooking the river meadows), Prickly Sowthistle and frequent Cow Parsley, Greater Burdock, Hedge Bindweed, Spear Thistle, Wild Teasel, Great Willowherb, Hogweed and Broad-leaved Dock. More occasional species in this habitat include Wild Angelica, Horseradish, Wormwood, Mugwort, Giant Hogweed and Curled Dock. Intermixed with these areas of tall ruderal are increasing areas of invading scrub, particularly frequent to locally abundant Bramble, Dog Rose and Elder, with locally frequent Butterfly-bush and occasional Hawthorn, Pedunculate Oak, Osier, Goat and Grey Sallow, and Crack Willow. Other species noted here were Sycamore, Field Maple, Silver Birch, Dogwood, Hazel, Wild Privet, Wild Plum, Bird Cherry, White Poplar and Rowan, with many of these probably surviving from past planting schemes, although due to the very shallow soil most of these have not done well and have died off during drought periods. At the far southern end of the compartment there is a part of the tip adjoining the leisure centre that has been fenced off. This area is overgrown with tall ruderal particularly thistles, Hemlock and Common Nettle, and there are patches of Elder scrub and some Dog Rose.

At the centre of this compartment are several patches of older and more established plantation woodland, composed mainly of monospecific stands of Field Maple, Beech and Wild Cherry, with a few other scattered individuals of Horse Chestnut, Silver Birch, Hazel, Ash, Swedish Whitebeam, Rowan and Common Lime. Much of the ground below is bare but there are areas of locally abundant Ground-ivy and Common Nettle, with locally frequent Field Forgetmenot and occasional Garlic Mustard, Herb Bennet and Stinking Iris.



Along the Warwick Road is a broad linear mature plantation which extends the whole length of the LWS, part of which presumably dates to late 1960's screening. This includes a wide variety of deciduous trees, especially Sycamore, Ash, Pedunculate Oak, Poplar and Crack Willow, but also Horse Chestnut, London Plane, Weeping Willow, Common Lime and other non-natives. In places, as at the northern end, it is quite scrubby due to past replanting, presumably in storm-damaged areas. Along the road the boundary hedge is mostly Hawthorn but with some Field Maple, Blackthorn, Elder and other shrubs. The ground flora below is mainly limited to abundant Ground-ivy and Common Nettle, with frequent Cow Parsley and occasional Cuckoo Pint, Herb Bennet, Stinking Iris, Wood Dock, Red Campion and Sweet Violet.

### **3) Northern Flood Meadow**

This former flood meadow was almost certainly an example of the nationally endangered MG4<sup>4</sup> (Meadow Foxtail-Great Burnet) NVC community when it was being managed as a hay meadow. As recently as 2002 Price refers to some Great Burnet still present here but despite searching it was not refound in this survey. It has unfortunately had to endure 25 years of neglect, so the field has deteriorated into the common MG1 grassland, typical of unmanaged swards. The rank neutral sward is dominated throughout most of the field by False Oat-grass, but with locally abundant Creeping Bent in some of the more open swards near the river where water sits in winter. Meadow grasses are now few but Meadow Foxtail, Yorkshire Fog and Meadow Barley are still locally frequent, the latter restricted to shorter swards near the river footpath and along the diagonal grass path which crosses the field from the car park. Other grasses noted were occasional Cocksfoot, Tufted Hair-grass, Common Couch and Red Fescue. Tall ruderal is becoming locally dominant throughout, particularly Great Willowherb, although grasses still have overall dominance. Other ruderal species include frequent Creeping Thistle and Common Nettle, with locally frequent Wild Angelica, Hemlock, Wild Teasel, Cleavers, Curled Dock, Prickly Sowthistle and occasional Welled Thistle, Meadowsweet, Purple Loosestrife, Broad-leaved and Clustered Docks, and Common Ragwort. Narrow-leaved Ragwort is rare, while Bramble is beginning to enter the field very locally. More typical meadow forbs surviving in the open and damper swards include locally abundant Hairy Sedge and Silverweed, the latter forming a large monospecific patch in the north-west corner nearest the car park; and locally frequent Meadow Vetchling (near river), Creeping Cinquefoil and Creeping Buttercup. More occasional species include Cut-leaved Cranesbill, Meadow Buttercup, Common Sorrel and notably, Common Valerian, the latter rare in the Stratford district.

### **4) Southern Flood Meadow**

Separated from the northern meadow by a scrubby ditch, this is slightly smaller but wetter than that meadow and would also originally have been an example of the rare MG4<sup>4</sup> flood meadow community. Unlike the northern meadow it is now dominated almost entirely by tall impenetrable Great Willowherb with only a sparse cover of False Oat-grass. Meadowsweet and Reed Canary-grass are however locally abundant, with locally frequent Wild Angelica and occasional Purple Loosestrife and Common Ragwort. There is a small swamp of Common Reed in the south-western corner where a pond was present in 2005. Reed is also locally frequent along most of the shoreline of the adjoining river and small patches have spread into the eastern side of this field. The only meadow forbs are restricted to the more open but narrow grassy perimeter and includes locally frequent Hairy Sedge and Meadow Vetchling, with occasional Agrimony and Lady's Bedstraw. There is a sparse scatter of shrubs developing within the meadow and on its borders including Field Maple, Spindle, Dog Rose, Elder and Grey Sallow. The large wildlife pond that was constructed in the northern corner of this field and fenced off is



now very overgrown and tends to dry out completely during periods of drought. It is now very difficult to view from the adjoining footpath. The pool is encircled by a dense and expanding swamp of abundant Common Reedmace, with frequent Great Willowherb, Purple Loosestrife and Reed Canary-grass. In the centre of the shallow pool is an expanse of abundant Meadowsweet and Gipsywort, with some Soft Rush, while the remaining open water is filled with the invasive alien, New Zealand Pigmyweed. The surrounding banks are overgrown with abundant Bramble and young Alder, Grey Sallow and Crack Willow. Some or all of these have been planted as they include the cultivar known as 'Corkscrew Willow'.

Both flood meadows have deteriorated since 2005 through neglect.

### 5) Swamp Fields

These are two small, long neglected, swampy meadows between the Southern Flood Meadow and the Swannery woodland, which are divided by a zigzagging drain bordered by mature Crack Willows which survives from the pre-tipping landscape. This widens out to form a narrow belt of wet willow woodland nearest the river. This belt contains a sparse shrub layer of Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Elder below, with a field layer dominated by Cow Parsley, Ground-ivy and Common Nettle. It also contains locally abundant Garlic Mustard, with occasional to locally frequent Greater Burdock, Field Horsetail, Herb Bennet, Hogweed and Wood Dock. To the north of this a line of Hybrid Black Poplars separates the compartment from the Southern Flood Meadow.

To the south of the wet woodland and bordering the river path is a small damp rectangular block of land with a community resembling Compartment 4, close to what is often called 'Fen Meadow'. Tall ruderal dominates, mainly consisting of Great Willowherb, Meadowsweet, Cleavers and Common Nettle. There is also locally abundant Meadow Cranesbill in this area, together with frequent Creeping Thistle, Broad-leaved Dock and occasional Wild Angelica. This habitat also extends into the northern of the two swamp fields, beyond the wooded drain but this area is not now easily accessed due to the growth of vegetation.

The larger southern field is however easily accessed by a well-used path. This passes by the circular sedge swamp. This swamp is still wet and ringed by concentric monospecific circles of tall Reed Canary-grass and then Common Couch. Although not accessible, the dominant sedge in this swamp appears to be Lesser Pond-sedge and not the county scarce Slender Tufted-sedge as stated in 2005 although closer examination will be needed. To the west of this swamp and on either side of the river path are further areas of wet fen meadow dominated by Great Willowherb, Meadowsweet and Reed Canary-grass, with frequent Wild Angelica and Purple Loosestrife. The rest of this field is marshy grassland containing areas of locally abundant Reed Sweet-grass swamp and tall ruderal 'fen meadow' habitat, with minor surviving patches of drier species-poor semi-improved grassland. Grasses include frequent Meadow Foxtail, False Oat-grass, Common Couch and both Smooth and Rough Meadow-grass. Forbs include locally abundant Gipsywort and Silverweed in areas of winter flooding, with locally frequent Greater Pond-sedge, False Fox-sedge, Hairy Sedge, Hedge Bindweed, Cleavers, Common Skullcap, Amphibious Bistort, Curled Dock, Bittersweet, and rare to occasional Meadow Cranesbill, Orange Balsam, Yellow Iris and Redshank.

Both fields would seem to be more overgrown than they were in 2005.

### 6) Swannery Pool and Woodland

This small compartment situated at the southern end of the site nearest to Clopton Bridge consists of the crescent shaped Swannery Pool (excavated around 1980) and a nearby artificial mound of excavated spoil. The whole of this area has been planted up with a range of trees and shrubs which



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include Sycamore, Alder, Horse Chestnut, Ash, Walnut, Wild Cherry, Pedunculate Oak, White and Grey Poplar, White and Weeping Willows and Osier, with parts of it still very scrubby. In the more mature and natural looking area nearest the river Crack Willow is dominant, while the path is bordered by dense Blackthorn scrub and there is some Guelder-rose. On the river side of the path here there is an open strip dominated by tall ruderal comprising Hemlock, Great Willowherb, Bramble and Common Nettle, with locally frequent Bristly Oxtongue and Marsh Woundwort. Away from here the shrub layer is still rather sparse, with only frequent Elder, occasional Hawthorn and Blackthorn, and rare Midland Hawthorn. The interior of the wood is partly inaccessible but most of the ground is either bare or dominated by Common Nettle. There are however patches of locally abundant Ground-ivy and Bramble, with locally frequent Garlic Mustard, Cow Parsley, Herb Bennet, Wood Dock and occasional Ivy. More diversity occurs along a wet drain (the outlet of a former stream) forming the northern boundary of the wood, and in the several wet hollows. Here there are patches of Wild Angelica, Pendulous Sedge, Greater and Lesser Pond-sedge, Meadowsweet, Purple Loosestrife and Common Reedmace, with rare to occasional Common Male-fern, Nipplewort and Common Figwort. Where this drain empties into the adjoining river there is rare Dewberry.

The Swannery Pool is difficult to access and is part shaded by over-hanging Alder, Ash and Crack Willow trees. The pool has quite steep sides but also a narrow shoreline in places which supports locally abundant Water Forgetmenot and frequent stands of Branched Bur-reed. There are also patches of Greater Pond-sedge, Great Willowherb, Purple Loosestrife, Gipsywort, Common Skullcap, Marsh Woundwort and Tansy.

It was not described in the 2005 citation.

**NB** The margins of the River Avon, strictly speaking part of a separate LWS, adds to the quality of this LWS, with extensive marginal areas of tall herb (especially Great Willowherb, Meadowsweet and Common Nettle) and Common Reed swamp. There are also scattered tree standards including old Crack Willow pollards.

### **6. Other Faunal, Floral and Fungal groups.**

The LWS supports a rich breeding avifauna, particularly warblers with nine species present, and is probably one of the best site for birds in the town of Stratford. Species recorded during the survey which were suspected or proved breeding (with territory counts in brackets where made) include: Pheasant, Sparrowhawk, Stock Dove, Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Jackdaw, Song Thrush, Dunnock, Grasshopper Warbler (one), Sedge Warbler (three), Reed Warbler (six), Lesser Whitethroat (one), Common Whitethroat (25), Garden Warbler (one), Blackcap (lots), Chiffchaff (lots), Willow Warbler (one), Long-tailed Tit, Treecreeper, Jay, Greenfinch (lots), Goldfinch, Bullfinch and Reed Bunting (one). Mute Swans, Canada Geese and Mallard breed along the river, while Grey Herons, Kingfishers and Grey Wagtails are regular visitors both there and on the Swannery Pool. Buzzards, Ravens and Kestrels are also regular visitors, the former possibly nesting. It would probably prove to be a good site for observing passage birds and on the second survey date a party of seven Common Crossbills were seen flying over.

Mammals observed during the survey included Roe Deer, Fox, Stoat, Rabbit, Field Vole, Common Shrew and Grey Squirrel. Otters occur regularly along the river and bred in 2020, while Water Voles last recorded in 2005 are now suspected to be still present nearby. A small breeding colony of Common Toads are reported to be present (presumably at the Swannery Pool) while Common Frog was seen. Ten species of common dragonfly occur and at least 22 species of butterfly, including Small Copper, Marbled White and the county threatened White-letter Hairstreak.



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An invertebrate survey in 1999 found two nationally scarce wasps, one RDB2 wasp, one nationally scarce bee and one nationally scarce fly (S J Falk).

### 7. Phase 1 Habitats present (with Phase 1 codes in brackets)\*

Broad-leaved plantation (A112), Dense scrub (A21), Scattered scrub (A22), Semi-improved neutral grassland (B22), Marshy grassland/Fen meadow (B5), Poor semi-improved grassland (B6), Tall ruderal (C31), Swamp (F1), Standing water (G1), Intact hedge (J21), Defunct hedge (J22).

\*Please refer to Appendix I Habitat Map

### 8. Evaluation against the criteria<sup>3</sup>

Habitat criteria applied: Mosaic

SCIENTIFIC CRITERIA	Elements of the criteria applying to the site						COMMUNITY CRITERIA	Elements of the criteria applying to the site				
	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5
Diversity	√	√	√				Physical & Visual Access	√	√			
Rarity	√	√					Educational Value		√		√	
Size	√						Community & Amenity Value	√	√			
Naturalness	√						Aesthetic Appeal & Landscape		√	√		
Fragility	√						Geographical Position		√			
Typicalness	√	√					Recorded History					
Ecological Position	√	√	√				Continuity of Land Use	√				
Significant Populations												
Potential Value	√											

### 9. Why this site qualifies as a Local Wildlife Site: summary of assessment

The Lench Meadows still qualifies as a Local Wildlife Site with 14 scientific and 11 community criteria applying, of which the following are considered the most important.





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### **Diversity**

The site includes a great variety of habitats including post-industrial mosaics of scrub, tall ruderal and semi-improved grassland, old neglected flood meadows, areas of marsh, swamp and fen meadow type habitats, deciduous plantation of different ages, hedges, riverside trees, ponds, wet drains and a large pool. These support a huge diversity of vascular flora (200 species found during the survey) and fauna, the latter particularly including birds and invertebrates.

### **Rarity**

Although no one habitat is threatened, the mosaic of habitats present is unusual in the county, particularly so near to a major town. These support several county notable<sup>7</sup> and uncommon or localised<sup>1</sup> plants including Wild Turnip, Musk Thistle, Spiked Sedge, Heath-grass, Long-stalked Cranesbill, Stinking Iris, Field Pepperwort, Spotted Medick, Black Poplar, Dewberry, Soapwort, Marsh Ragwort and Common Valerian. Others have been recorded including the county rare Little Mouse-ear which is probably still present. At least two nationally red-listed<sup>5</sup> birds breed (Grasshopper Warbler and Song Thrush) and there is a good population of the fast-declining Greenfinch which will soon probably join them. White-letter Hairstreak, a county scarce butterfly which is subject of a LBAP, has been known to breed while five nationally scarce flies, bees and wasps have been recorded.

### **Size**

The site is one of the largest semi-natural sites and the largest LWS in the vicinity of Stratford.

### **Fragility**

Many of the open habitats are slowly degrading through lack of any form of management.

### **Ecological Position**

The meadows lie in a strategic place alongside the River Avon and so will be important for migrant birds and connectivity with other sites along the river. It is also very close to another major ecological site across the road at Welcombe Hills NR. It adjoins similar habitat to the north which is not yet part of the LWS.

### **Potential Value**

Management of some of the habitats would significantly improve the ecological value of the site. Most important of these would be wetting up and restoring the northern flood meadow to a nationally threatened MG4 community<sup>4</sup>, which would not only help species diversity but also potentially help with local flood control. The site could also potentially be of county importance in reintroducing Water Voles to the Avon once the mink population is under control. More could be made of the site as a local educational resource for schools and colleges.

### **Physical and Visual Access**

There is open public access to the whole site, although easy wheelchair access is restricted to the paved river path.

### **Community and Amenity Value**

The site is important to the people of Stratford as a recreational facility and is an excellent site for introducing people to the natural world.



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<b>Sources of information:</b>		Ecosite No: 71/25	
<b>Survey Details:</b>			
Date: 15/07 and 05/08/2020 01/07/2005  14/07/2009 25/02/1999 23/07/1999 2002	Survey Type: Phase 2  Phase 2/Management Plan  Phase 1 Phase 1 Invertebrates General records	Surveyors: J J Bowley, C Talbot.  D Cole, D Lowe, A Swift. LH I Tanner S J Falk J M Price	Location of records HBA  HBA/WBRC  HBA HBA WBRC “ <i>Stratford-upon-Avon - A Flora and Fauna</i> ”. Wallingford.
<b>Any Other Information:</b> The site is also popularly known as Warwick Road Fields. A management plan was drawn up for the site by WCC ecologists in 2005 but not taken forward.			
<b>Management</b>			
<u>Category</u>	<u>Current management</u>	<u>Management recommendation</u>	
A	Good	Maintain current regime	
B	Medium	Enhance current regime	
<b>C</b>	<b>Minimal</b>	<b>Enhance as necessary</b>	
D	Inappropriate	Change management regime	
<b>Recommendations:</b> Due to its location, wealth of habitats and connectivity to other sites via the River Avon, this is one of the most important wildlife sites close to Stratford. Therefore, it is vital that a suitable management plan (devised by or with the help of WCC ecologists) is adopted and work begun as soon as it is possible before some of the more valuable habitats deteriorate too much. Urgent work should include restoring the northern river meadow to an MG4 <sup>4</sup> flood meadow (a national priority habitat) with an annual cut and the introduction of green hay from suitable SSSI donor meadows, restoring ponds, eradicating any invasive alien plants, and laying out a network of official paths. The latter would involve closing some existing ones that penetrate more sensitive parts of the site, allowing some large pockets of tall ruderal and scrub to remain undisturbed for nesting birds. The southern flood meadow should be kept as wet fen meadow but in the long term could be diversified by putting in several scrapes and ponds, which will potentially help protected Otters and Water Voles. Both river meadows are potentially important for holding back flood water which could threaten the town centre, so are important elements in local plan climate change mitigation. The small unmanaged field to the north of the Northern Field, known as ‘the Onion Field’ has good habitat and could be added to the site. It is strongly recommended that the Lench Meadows becomes a Local Nature Reserve.			



## Local Wildlife Sites Project: Citation for The Lench Meadows

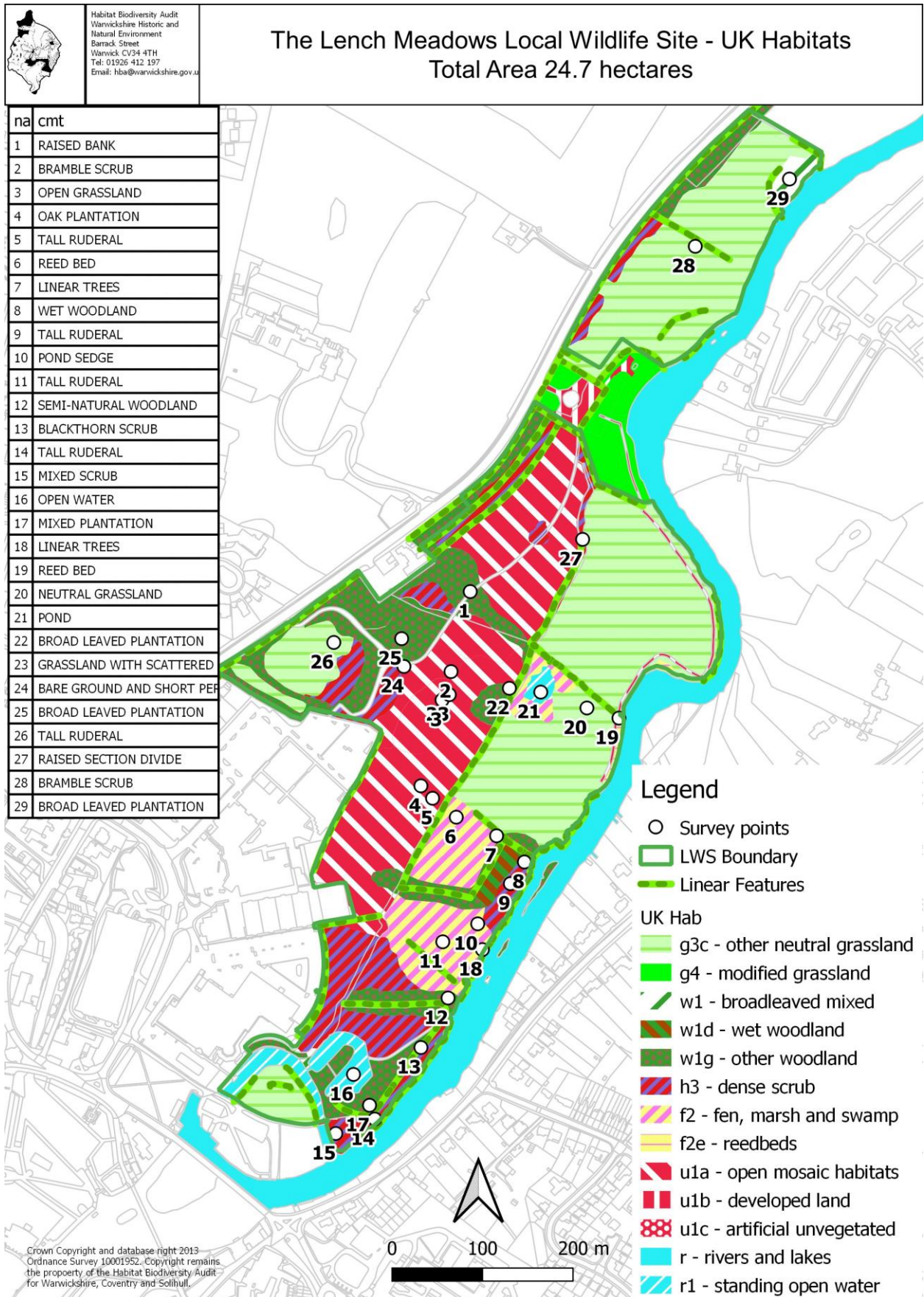
Completed by: J J Bowley	Date: 20/11/2020
Passed by Sites Selection Panel: Yes / No / Deferred (Further survey required).	
Signed by the Chair:	Date:
On behalf of the LWS panel.	

### References

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2. JNCC. (1993 repr.). *Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey: a technique for environmental audit*. Peterborough: JNCC.
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Appendix 1





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